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Niger rapidly emerges as a key U.S. partner in anti-terrorism fight in Africa



HAMA BOUREIMA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES - French Socialist Party national secretary Harlem Desir meets with Niger's president Mahamadou Issoufou, left, on March 17 in Niamey.

By Craig Whitlock,
Apr 14, 2013 11:06 AM EDT
The Washington Post

NIAMEY, Niger — As the Obama administration expands its counterterrorism operations in Africa, this country is rapidly emerging as a key U.S. partner.

President Mahamadou Issoufou was elected in a free and fair vote two years ago and wins praise in Washington as a model democrat. But on a wall of the presidential palace in the capital of Niamey, framed photos of his predecessors — a succession of glum-faced military dictators and deposed civilians — illustrate the West African country's volatile history since it won independence from France in 1960.

Latest from National Security North Korea's enigmatic young leader offers many faces and many threats



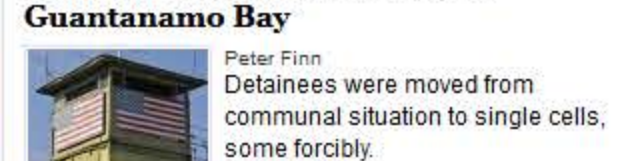
Ernesto Londoño
Analysts speculate that Kim Jong Un is blustering to secure his image at home and concessions from the U.S.

With U.S. operations expanding in Africa, Niger emerges as a key partner



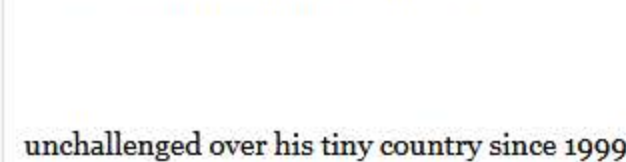
Craig Whitlock
With chaos in Mali and militant groups holding sway in Libya, Niger president fears spillover violence.

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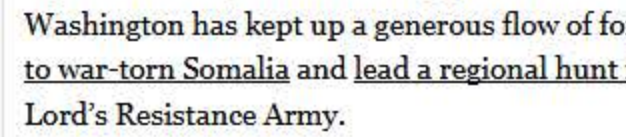
Victoria Nuland, spokesperson for the State Department, said Thursday that the U.S. is taking the necessary prudent actions to defend against North Korea's threats.

Military and detainees clash at Guantanamo Bay



Peter Finn
Detainees were moved from communal situation to single cells, some forcibly.

U.S. names Russians to sanctions list for human rights abuses



Joby Warrick and Will Englund
Sanctioning of 18 Russians under so-called Magnitsky Act draws reprisal warnings from Moscow.

With chaos enveloping Mali to the west and militant groups holding sway in Libya to the north, Issoufou frets about a possible spillover of violence into Niger. But, in an interview, he said those preoccupations would not cause his country to backslide on human rights or good governance. He also pointed to the benefits of cooperation with the U.S. military, which he invited to base surveillance drones here.

"Today, everyone agrees with the links between security, democracy and development," he said, speaking in French and dressed in white tribal regalia. "For the short term, the solution is military, but for the long term it is development."

The Pentagon is deepening its military involvement across Africa as it confronts an expanding array of terrorist movements and guerrilla groups. In doing so, the U.S. government has become dependent on several countries with checkered democratic records. That in turn has lessened Washington's leverage to push those countries to practice free elections and the rule of law.

In Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, President Ismail Omar Guelleh has ruled unchallenged over his tiny country since 1999 by marginalizing political opponents and confining journalists. Still, the U.S. government has embraced Guelleh as a friend because he has allowed the Pentagon to build a major counter-terrorism base on his territory.

In Uganda, where Yoweri Museveni has served as president for 27 years, U.S. officials have objected to the persecution of gay men and lesbians and other human-rights abuses. But Washington has kept up a generous flow of foreign aid. It also pays Uganda to send troops to war-torn Somalia and lead a regional hunt for Joseph Kony, the brutal leader of the Lord's Resistance Army.

In Kenya, U.S. diplomats warned there would be unspecified "consequences" if the country elected a fugitive from the International Criminal Court as its new president. Kenyans did so anyway, and the Obama administration has hesitated to downgrade relations because it needs help on counter-terrorism.

Human-rights groups have also accused the U.S. government of holding its tongue about political repression in Ethiopia, another key security partner in East Africa.

"The countries that cooperate with us get at least a free pass," acknowledged a senior U.S. official who specializes in Africa but spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid retribution. "Whereas other countries that don't cooperate, we ream them as best we can."

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